

On Violence in Homewood

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The Rachel Maddow show (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26315908/>) aired an extended segment on 6 May 2011 featuring the Reverend Ricky Burgess, a member of the City Council in Pittsburgh, PA. The segment detailed the large problem of violence in Councilman Burgess' district, the Homewood neighborhood of east Pittsburgh. The segment was prompted by the fact that the National Rifle Association (NRA) was holding its annual convention in Pittsburgh that week, and Ms. Maddow wanted to demonstrate to her viewers the damage inflicted upon neighborhoods by "gun violence".

Ms. Maddow did an excellent job interviewing Councilman Burgess. We learned, among other things, that Homewood is the poorest, most violent, and most drug-infested district in the area; that many bystanders have been killed in shootouts between various local residents; that the local business district has been ruined because of all the shootings; and that the only remedy is to end the shootings. He elaborated on the immediate causes of the gunfights: "colors", "territory" (the "owning of streets"), and girls: what would normally be fistfights sometimes turn into shootouts. It turns out that Councilman Burgess has lost several family members to these violent crimes, in addition to several victims in his church congregation. But he also noted that Homewood was at one time a fine neighborhood, dominated by Irish and Italians, most of them steelworkers, and that there had been very little of this type of violence in those past decades.

Mr. Burgess noted at one point that the "Constitution gives the right to own a gun", but the lobbying effort by the NRA has in practice imposed a "death sentence" on Homewood. Therefore, he said, it is important to pass some "reasonable" gun restrictions to bring the neighborhood back to its former greatness. He informed us, however, that the state legislature is "controlled" by the NRA and that because of state pre-emption laws, Pittsburgh is unable to pass "common-sense" gun control laws attendant to its needs. In response to a question by Ms. Maddow, he mentioned the type of laws that are necessary: a) a prohibition on assault rifles; b) stronger background checks; c) no guns from gun shows to be permitted; d) to create a lost and stolen gun registry; and e) regulations on possession, maintaining, and training to own a handgun.

I have a great deal of sympathy for Councilman Burgess and his family. It must be a terrible thing to see and hear about people you know and love be killed or injured in this type of widespread violence. But, I shall explain why his proposals cannot work, and why the NRA rightly resists any weakening of the right to keep and bear arms. Just as an aside, the Constitution does not "grant" the right to own a gun, or any other rights. The rights mentioned in the Constitution predated it; the Constitution only states that those rights exist, and that the government has no power to contravene them. But let's consider his recommendations.

First, the rate of gun ownership in America has remained fairly constant over the decades. It's not as though the neighborhood was peaceful when the Irish and Italians lived there because they were completely unarmed. They were probably as fully armed as the current residents of Homewood.

Secondly, he proposes a prohibition on "assault rifles" and various other regulations. Now, would that be the same type of prohibition we have had for 90 years on the possession of cocaine? You know, the same cocaine that is available in nearly every neighborhood in America, including Homewood? How will one distinguish a gun that is purchased at a gun show from one that is stolen? How will a registry of stolen guns prevent the next robbery to be committed with it? New York and Chicago has prohibitions on handguns now; does that work for them?

In short, does the Councilman really believe that people who are so morally debased that they would shoot people because they are wearing the wrong "color", unafraid of the laws against murder, will be deterred by some gun-control laws? Of course not -- he knows full well that such laws will have no effect on retards and professional criminals. Such laws are designed to fail, and once the failure thereof is evident, he will be leading the charge for even stricter laws, leading eventually to a complete prohibition on firearm possession -- for the law-abiding, that is. No prohibitions faze the professionals (look up "mafia", "yakuza", "Crips", "KKK", "MS-13", or "Hell's Angels"). I suspect that is why no rational person or organization that advocates the security of a free state could support the Councilman's proposals; they would only lead to a complete loss of all the citizen's rights sooner or later.

I do have two experiments to suggest. Suppose all the people currently living in Homewood were moved to some prosperous neighborhood, and were replaced by NRA members? If Councilman Burgess is correct, two salutary things would happen: the current residents of Homewood would be safe and secure in a good neighborhood (that's only fair), and the evil sinister inanimate-object guns would be randomly killing NRA members in Homewood (that would be fair too).

The second experiment is equally unlikely. How about those convicted of killing innocent people get hung by the neck until dead, not in some prison, but at the scene of their crime? How about we require that the body remain in place on the rope for 90 days, right there under the streetlight? One never knows -- it is possible that a few derelicts fed to the crows might make some impression on the other mental rejects shooting up Homewood. Until we find a way to deal with the thinking of men, regulating the possession of things will not matter. But I am sure the good Reverend already knows that.